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THE NAME
OF
THIS CHURCH

FROM BISHOP CHESHIRE'S
CONVENTION ADDRESS

1903

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THE NAME OF THIS CHURCH.

A question which comes before this Convention, and which is exciting much attention throughout the Church, is the proposed change in the name, the legal designation, of the Church. The committee of the General Convention to whom it was referred, with instructions to endeavor to ascertain the mind of the Church on this subject, have asked us to consider the question, and to express ourselves upon it.

There is a difficulty, and a possible impropriety, in any formal determination by us, in our diocesan council, of the question thus raised. Upon the floor of the General Convention all such matters must be discussed and decided. We should send our deputies to the General Convention prepared to act with freedom and intelligence, and not with their hands tied and their minds fettered by our diocesan determinations. At the same time there is an element of wisdom in this effort to develop and to ascertain the mind of the Church throughout the country, for the enlightenment of the members of the General Convention. I think, therefore, that we may profitably consider and discuss the question of the change of name, but we should do so, not for the purpose of securing this or that action by our Convention, but with the frank confidence and affection of brethren, bringing each his contribution to the subject for mutual information, that coming thus to know what is the common mind of the Church, we may be the better prepared in the end to shape our action for the benefit and satisfaction of all.

This is by no means a new question. It was raised by the very adoption of the name "Protestant Episcopal" during the period of our organization following the war of the American Revolution. Before that time the Church had not called itself "Protestant Episcopal," though that name did very fairly describe its position upon some very important issues. And it is a matter of fact, which no one will dispute, that while that has remained our legal designation,

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it has not justified itself in popular use. Outside the Church in America we are popularly known as *"Episcopalians"* merely; inside the Church and far beyond the limits of the Church, in the historical and literary tradition and consciousness of the English-speaking people, we are *Churchmen,* members and perpetuators of the great historic Church of our race. This being the case, it is not surprising that from time to time voices should be raised in advocacy of some designation which should more accurately express the true character and the Catholic heritage of the Church of our fathers.

Personally I have never been very deeply interested in the movement which for the last twenty or thirty years has been directed towards effecting a change in our corporate name. It has not seemed to me that the Catholicity of the Church was affected one way or the other by the legal designation which we might adopt. *"To be rather than to seem,"* is the legend on our State flag, and it may well be adopted by us as expressing the aspirations of our Church life. The Church has so much to do in preaching the truth to a careless and callous world that it may seem to some a waste of time and of energy to be disputing over names.

Yet there is a power in words, for words not only express human convictions; they convey divine truth. We cannot ignore this question now that it is raised, and is propounded to us, in effect, by our highest legislative body. There is, I fear, a Pseudo-Catholic agitation which, under the guise of Catholic teaching, seeks to impose upon us the very errors and corruptions which we have rejected, and which the great body of our Church people detest. It is a fear of this influence which more than anything else retards the movement in favor of a more exact and appropriate designation. But we should not be afraid of a frank and earnest discussion of any question of real importance; and the question of a proper name for the Church is a question of importance. Let us speak our minds freely and with perfect charity towards one another. We may differ in opinion. I thank God that among the Clergy and laity of North Carolina there are none who do not desire to be faithful to the Truth, as this Church, now commonly known and legally designated

as the Protestant Episcopal Church, hath received the same. If any favor change of name, it is not that we may change our essential position and message, but that we may express more clearly to the world and to our own people that which this Church hath always received and taught.

I make, therefore, my own small contribution to this great subject, feeling it to be my duty to open my mind to you, my brethren and fathers; yet feeling no inclination to force the minds of others; and holding myself perfectly free to consider and to decide, as in my judgment may then seem best, when the matter shall come up in the House of Bishops. And whatever may be your feelings in the matter, I respectfully suggest that this Convention take no action which shall hamper the freedom of discussion and of action by those honored presbyters and laymen, whom we may send as our deputies to the next General Convention.

For my own part I think our present legal title inappropriate, not to use a stronger word. This is the ancient Church of our people, as it has come down to us in America, and as it has adjusted itself to the circumstances of our American life. It delivers the message which it has received from primitive and apostolic ages by an unbroken ecclesiastical tradition; and it has always thus presented itself. It is not a Church which draws its inspiration and its purpose from the controversies, the noble contentions, of the Reformation. That was but an incident in its history, one of its recent experiences. Why should it name itself after one particular phase of its latest period?

And observe that the Church of England never called itself a Protestant Church. It did call itself a Reformed Church, but not Protestant. And in this connection we cannot but recall the beautiful mural inscription in the chancel of Christ Church, Raleigh, to the memory of Bishop Ravenscroft, who is there called *Episcopus Ecclesiae Reformatae,* Bishop of the Reformed Church. Luther was a Protestant in the proper sense of the word. He endeavored most earnestly to effect certain reforms in the Church of which he was a priest. He failed. When fully convinced of their failure, and hopeless of success by any further efforts, his adherents at the Diet of Spires in 1529, being overborne by the

Papal party, entered their solemn PROTEST against evils which they found themselves helpless to remedy. Thus they became Protestants, and built their separate organization, and justified their separation, upon their Protest, upon their inability to correct the corruptions and superstitions of the Church. They and those who occupy their position are Protestants. Happily our experience was different. The Church of England during this period became aroused to the same errors in doctrine and corruption in morals, and to the usurpations of the Bishop of Rome over other churches and nations. And having became thus aroused she proceeded, not to protest, but to reform. She had no occasion to protest. A protest is a confession of weakness. The protest bears witness to the faithfulness of heart and spirit when overborne by the power of evil. He who can correct the evil which he sees does not protest. He is otherwise occupied. He abates the evil. To call this Church a Protestant Church is in the proper sense of the word not only a misnomer; it is to be ungrateful to God who saved us from the necessity of helpless protest, and blessed the efforts of our fathers to purge out the evil from His Church, and to preserve it in its integrity and continuity for the ages to come. Thus it is, my brethren, that the word Protestant presents itself to my mind as it stands in the title of the Church. Of course it has many other associations. It connotes many other ideas. But that is its meaning historically and logically. I am not ashamed of the word. In a sense I honor it, and glory in it. But it is not my family name. I do not think it a proper designation for this Church.

But our discussion should not be merely negative. Is there a better name? We claim to be, and we are, the representatives to our people and our country, of the ancient Church before the days of schisms and divisions. We should be true to our history, and we should not, I think, give any cause of offence to our brethren who put their claims upon distinctly different grounds, if we should call this, the American Catholic Church. Simply to say, as some have proposed that this is "the Church in the United States," or "the American Church" would be offensive to many of our Christian brethren, as seeming to suggest an injurious infer-

ence. To call this Church the American Catholic Church would simply be to set forth what it has always held itself out as being, namely, the representative in our country and for our people of the ancient Church of our race. It could in reason be offensive to none save to that Church which imposes its false and modern tenets as the tests of Catholicity. To assert our true Catholic doctrine and position against the Church of Rome will be the most effective way in which we can illustrate the reality of our opposition to her false teaching. No reformed communion can with justice resent our taking the name American Catholic, since none of them claim it..

Certainly all true churchmen should feel the appropriateness of this name. At every service we confess our faith in the Holy Catholic Church. While we do not claim to be the Holy Catholic Church in its entirety, we stultify ourselves unless we believe, and unless we let the world understand that we believe, this Church to be a living branch of that Holy Catholic Church in which we profess our faith.

It has been objected that thus to limit the universal by saying the American Catholic Church, is to expose ourselves to the criticism directed by our own divines against the name Roman Catholic. The very simple and very sufficient reply to this is that so long as the Roman Church confines herself to Rome, she may well call herself the Roman Catholic Church. It is only in other countries that the name Roman Catholic, as a name, becomes illogical.

As illustrating the propriety of the word Catholic in the name of this Church, it is interesting to recall the fact that upon the organization of the Church in the Confederate States in 1861 the Rev. Dr. Hines, a native of North Carolina, and formerly an honored presbyter of the Diocese, but then residing in Tennessee, moved to substitute in the title of the Church the words "Reformed Catholic" in place of the words "Protestant Episcopal." The motion did not prevail, but Bishops Atkinson, Otey and Green voted for the change, all of them, we may say, North Carolina Bishops. We need not fear that we shall go very far wrong when we are following in their steps.

Brethren beloved, I have shown you my mind in this matter. I am not very greatly exercised over it. I do not believe that the change will be made at once. It may never be made at all. We need not wait to be truly Catholic until we call ourselves by that name. Above all we must not be so un-Catholic in mind and heart as to misjudge each other and impute disloyalty, in one direction or the other, to those who differ with us. Let us speak our mind in love and with mutual respect and forbearance. Speaking the truth in love shall help us to grow up into Him in all things, who is our Head, and shall make our very controversies to be but brighter manifestations of mutual charity and concord."

Jos. Blount Cheshire,
Bishop of North Carolina.

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